

# Pontoon & Deck Boat PDB MAGAZINE

MARCH 2016

## BACK IN **BLACK**

JC'S MIDNIGHT  
SHADOW  
EDITION



# 6TIPS

TO AVOID LOOKING  
LIKE A NEWBIE



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Issue No. 3

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# Pontoon & Deck Boat

## MAGAZINE HISTORY



### Looking Back — March 2006

By Austa Cook

It's funny to see what people got upset about in March of 2006, but it's also sobering to see this attitude is still around today. What attitude am I talking about? Ten years ago, one opinionated reader who wrote in to the Letters To The Editor section thought we were the devil incarnate.

This person brought up our use of the title "Holiday Gift Guide" instead of "Christmas Gift Guide" in a previous issue. He pointed out not recalling receiving any gifts for Thanksgiving or New Year's—which could be a fair point, assuming no one in our national audience celebrated other holidays like Hanukkah that also involves gift-giving.

"Don't think I don't know what you people in publishing are trying to do with your political correctness," he sternly reprimanded.

Whoa. From the way he reacted, he was probably imagining the PDB team holed up in a cave doing devil worship and performing human sacrifices while we wrote the content.

"How will we undermine all things good in this world?" one of us would cackle.

"I know, by calling it a Holiday Gift Guide!" another would sneer. "See? There's no mention of Christmas...Eviill!"

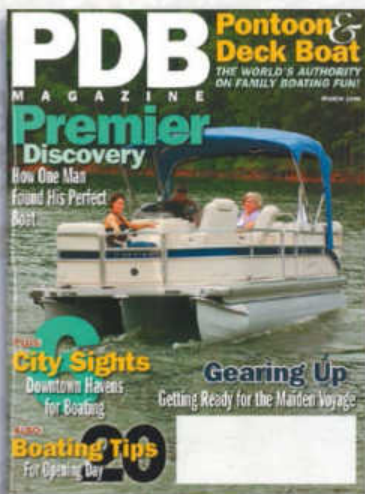
A dastardly plan—if it were true. But don't you kind of think Christmas is included in the word "holiday," while still including other faiths?

Not in this guy's mind.

"You're wrong and don't bother apologizing. I don't want to be your pen pal," he wrote in his send-off.

Ouch.

It got me to thinking, who else could



we have offended in this 2006 issue? For starters, in our From The Forums write-up, we make a point to give a shout out to those boaters in cold weather states, because hearing only about the warm weather son-of-a-guns would surely result in an epidemic of raised blood pressures and fist-waving above the Sun Belt. Conflict avoided. Wait, was it? Because now I'm sure

the warm weather states are offended that we tried so hard to represent the northerners. That's probably a fail.

Then there are girls shown wakeboarding and fishing, to appease the feminist crowd—but wait, that also could offend the misogynists out there who want to hog the wakeboards and fishing all to themselves.

Fail.

The article on making the most of your boat purchase shows a guy faning out a handful of \$20's, which nicely pleases the frugal, money-saving crowd. But, rats, anyone who dislikes Andrew Jackson's mug is not going to like him staring back at them ten times over, so scratch that.

Fail.

We tried to represent boating in various cities with spotlights on places like Cleveland, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Penn., but shoot—that just brings up the bad blood between the Browns and the Steelers fans, so now everyone's mad.

Well, mission accomplished? I'm exhausted, and all this kind of shows no matter what, people can get offended over things that were ironically enough meant to be inoffensive. I don't know about you, but I think I'll go back to my cave now and wait this one out.

# PDB

MAGAZINE

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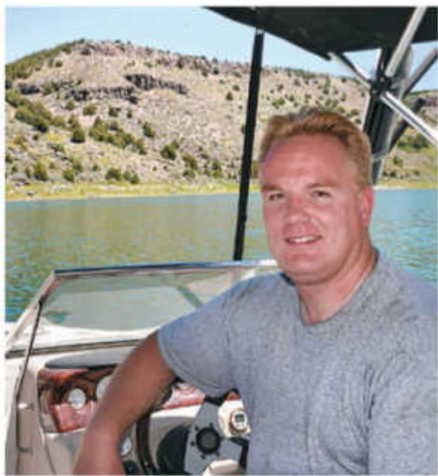
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## This Is What I'm Seeing

In a lot of ways, boat show season is similar to a couple of months worth of family reunions—although it ironically includes spending a lot of time away from our own families. The reunions are with boat manufacturers, dealers, engine reps, aftermarket companies and anyone else who has a familiar face.

Each winter I hit the trail known as “Boat Show Season” and one thing that always impresses me is just how hard some of these men and women in our industry really work. I’ll only hit a couple of shows a year, but for some manufacturer reps it’s a couple of shows a month or more during this stretch! I guess their spouses just know not to plan anything on a weekend from January to March.

I’m not sure if it’s just small talk or a genuine question coming from someone forced to the confines of a small booth, but I always get asked the question, “What are you seeing that’s interesting?” as I greet friends in the marine industry. So after spending some time on the convention floor, I’m happy to report this is “What I’m seeing” at the boat shows this year:

1) Pontoon boats are smokin’ hot. I know I’ve been saying this for years but it’s absolutely true. Pontoon boats are dominating the show floors like no other boat in the industry and even shows like the Miami International Boat Show are getting onboard with this trend.

2) Free stuff never goes out of style. You would think by now we’d all have enough pens and drink coozies to last us a lifetime, yet these giveaways draw people into booths time and time again. Attendees are even willing to provide personal contact info just for a cheap Frisbee.

3) Big boat sales are up. By big I mean high-ticket, twin engine \$100K plus type pontoons that are making cruiser salesmen nervous. In fact, I was at a boat show this year where the longest boat on display throughout the show was

a pontoon boat! Dealers don’t want to waste valuable booth space on huge cruiser models when the crowds are looking for ‘toons and deck boats under 30 feet long.

4) Value is king. While pontoon boats with price tags greater than my first house are on the incline, the heart of our niche has always been about value-driven models. As I walked the shows this year the “bells and whistles” models got a lot of the attention, but I was pleased to see that for less than \$40K a family can still get a great model with power.

5) Boat carpet is extinct. We’ve been making our opinion on carpeted pontoons known for years and it’s nice to see the industry (and consumers) agree. The majority of pontoons on display have gone away from carpet and are now showcasing flooring materials that actually belong in the boating industry.

6) Just a little more horsepower. Dealers used to display pontoons and deck boats with smaller engines so the boat show price tags looked friendlier, but consumers see right through this. Now these boats are equipped with not only a more realistic outboard on the back, but a good balance of options as well. No buyer wants to get all excited about a great boat that falls within their budget just to find out the steering wheel is not included with the show special price.

Well that’s what I’m seeing this year at the shows—as well as a lot of other exciting trends. If you happen to see any of the PDB staff out walking your local boat show be sure to stop us and say hi. We’ll be happy to add you to our reunion list. 

Brady L. Kay,  
PDB Editor

---

*“Attendees are even willing to provide personal contact info just for a cheap Frisbee.”*

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## Dock Like A Pro

### Six tips to avoid looking like a newbie

**Your palms are sweating, your knees are knocking, and your heart is beating like a tambourine in your chest.**

Did you think this was a tribute to your first kiss? Nope! This is probably how we all felt our first time trying to dock a pontoon or deck boat. And maybe the second time...and hundredth time...and possibly even the last time you had the boat out.

No matter where you are on your boating journey, it has to be said that docking is one of the most stressful situations for newbies and veterans alike. What becomes routine in ordinary weather can suddenly bring you right back to shaking in your flip flops when the wind changes direction or the current is unusually feisty. Here are some quick tips to remind you that you can master the art of docking.

#### DOCKING TIP #1

Take it as slow as the conditions will allow. As you approach your slip, keep up enough momentum to pull in without getting hung up by the wind or current. You want just enough forward movement to get you into place with a smooth shift to reverse enough to stop your boat as soon as you're in position.

#### DOCKING TIP #2

Don't lose your momentum—or your nerves. A lot of docking efforts go bad when you get nervous and pull back prematurely. Once you lose that momentum, it's easy for the wind or current to push you around. Stick to your guns and maintain that target speed. Remember, you can always pull out and start over, but don't lose your nerve and cut the throttle before you're in the right position.

#### DOCKING TIP #3

Get to know your prop. A common phenomenon that occurs, particularly in reverse, is your boat "walking" to one side because of the rotation of the prop. This is different for every boat and prop setup, so this is likely something you'll have to re-learn with a new boat. Once you get a feel for how your boat wants to move sideways, you'll be able to compensate and better work with it when pulling in and out of the dock. Don't be afraid of the "walk."

#### DOCKING TIP #4

Use your surroundings to your advantage. If you have the room for it, take a nice wide turn into the slip, and keep a tight corner

on the side of your boat that's closest to the dock. If you don't, just make sure to turn that wheel like you mean it. If the current is tugging at you or a strong

wind's a blow'n, try to work with nature to get your boat where you want it to go.

If possible, try to dock into the wind and current, even if it means changing up which way you approach the slip.

#### DOCKING TIP #5

Practice makes perfect. The best way to get good at docking in every situation is to practice docking in every situation. It's as simple as that. If it helps you focus, try to practice pulling in and out of the slip when there are no bystanders around to watch. With repetition, you'll start to develop that muscle memory for where everything on the helm is in relation to your hands.



As everything becomes more natural to you, you'll be able to get a feel for how the wind and current manipulate your boat and what effect "walking" has on your maneuverability. Bring along a trusted deckhand to help you out, preferably someone with experience, of course. You don't want this to be the blind leading the blind.



#### DOCKING TIP #6

Don't expect to always dock perfectly. Ask that old salty sea dog a few slips over if he gets it right every time, and he'll likely laugh in your face at the prospect. Nobody has a perfect docking record, so don't feel pressured to get it right in one go. Just take a deep breath and try it again, as many times as you need to.

Hopefully, revisiting these pointers will help you feel more at home with pulling in and out of the slip. Let's save those butterflies in the stomach for remembering your first kiss and not for docking. 🌸





Dragging a drift sock can slow your boat's speed, direction and angle even in a stiff breeze, allowing a slower and more natural presentation of your bait while drifting or trolling.

# PDB's Tackle Box

TIPS FOR THE ANGLER By Dan Armitage

## Sock It To 'Em



Drift bags are so popular on the Great Lakes that Apex Marine offers pontoon models with dedicated cleats positioned specifically for use when tying off drift socks and buckets.

March can be breezy and higher-profile fishing craft such as deck boats and pontoons can be a challenge to control when attempting to drift, troll or maneuver at slow speeds under primary or electric motor power. In this age of high tech accessories designed to help you do everything from back your trailer down the launch ramp to parallel park your boat against a dock, the remedy is as simple as it is radical. Solving something as simple as slowing the drift of a boat should be a no-brainer for developing the next "must-have" accessory breakthrough (can you say "power anchors?"), but nothing to date compares with the effectiveness and adaptability of a device that sailors have deployed for eons. They are known as

"drogues" and "sea anchors" to sailors, and "drag bags" or "drift socks" to present-day fishermen, and the best way to control your boat's progress, whether drifting with the breeze or under power, is a dragged bucket or bag.

What's more, if you toss a drift sock or five-gallon pail over your rail to simply slow your trolling speed or stifle your drift on a breezy day, you're missing out on the full potential of modern-day drift socks.

You can employ these sub-surface parachutes in a variety of ways to help your fishing effort, from keeping your drift broadside to allow maximum casting room for anglers aboard to steering the boat when used in conjunction with electric motors. At anchor, dropping a bucket





*A drift sock acts as an underwater parachute to slow a boat's forward progress.*



*This angler drags a five-gallon bucket he has adapted for ease of use with holes, weights and a pop-bottle float to slow the pace of his boat while trolling for Great Lakes walleye and trout.*

primary engines may suffer fouled plugs and stalling when operated at their lowest RPMs for extended trolling periods. Dragging a pickle bucket or drift sock can reduce a boat's pace up to 2 mph from the slowest attainable speed and allow anglers to troll lures designed to fool fish that won't respond to fleeter tactics.

Whether dragging a dedicated drift sock or basic five-gallon bucket, just remember to pull them in before you power-up, or risk kissing it—and perhaps the cleat that secured it—goodbye! 

drift sock off the side can stabilize a boat in rough conditions, buffering the rocking and lurching, as well as keeping the boat positioned at an angle to the anchor, wind and/or current to maximize fishing opportunities.

The same is true while drifting, when a drag bag can be used to control the direction and angle of the drift along a shoreline, weed line or underwater break. High profile boats such as pontoons have a tendency to drift with the bow down-wind. Adding a drift sock to the bow will direct the boat to drift perpendicular to the breeze. Adding a second, smaller sock to the transom will slow the boat down even more, while maintaining the proper angle of drift. When the wind really picks up, using a drift control of some type can make the difference between being able to fish or not by simply slowing the boat down to a pace from which lures can be cast, drifted or trolled.

Slowing trolling speed remains the most common use for buckets and drift socks. Multi-purpose boats with larger engines that aren't rigged for fishing with an electric or kicker motor may not be able to slow down enough to effectively pull baits through the water. Even boats with smaller

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#### Dan's Pick:

## Apex Angler Qwest 822 Pro Troll TT2



Apex boats designed the Angler Quest 822 Pro Troll pontoon for hardcore fishing. The triple pontoon boasts a center console design and other than a pair of small fold-down jump seats and a center-mounted fishing console against the transom, there's nothing to interfere with the fishing action aft. The 4-inch-wide gunwale is capped by Traxstech accessory tracks that run the length of the cockpit and overhead is an aluminum radar arch/rocket launcher that has no fewer than 16 rod holders: four adjustable models down each side and eight static holders across the top.

The fishing console aft holds a 22 gallon livewell/baitwell, tackle trays, quick-measure fish board and a rack for fishing pliers. Up front is a pair of 60-inch-long bench seats while underfoot is a Qwest Gen II hull package featuring three 23-inch-diameter tubes of 0.90-inch alloy fitted with lifting strakes and reinforced nose cones supporting a deck that has designated attachment points for drift socks. 

#### Apex Angler Qwest 822 Pro Troll TT2:

|                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Length:</b>             | 23'6"                     |
| <b>Beam:</b>               | 8'                        |
| <b>Fuel Capacity:</b>      | 26 gals                   |
| <b>Passenger Capacity:</b> | 13/1,900 lbs              |
| <b>Dry weight:</b>         | 2,250 lbs                 |
| <b>Max HP:</b>             | 150                       |
| <b>Price:</b>              | \$45,995 (w/ Mercury 150) |

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# No Wake Zone

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## More Colors, Better Choices

Infinity Fabrics has just introduced a new upholstery vinyl line to the boating industry with its Superior Upholstery Vinyl. This colorfast product carries a seven-year UV/fade warranty and comes in more than 51 colors in both leatherette and carbon fiber patterns.



"We developed the best floor covering and thereby defined a new standard expectation for performance," says Steve Couch, owner of Infinity Fabrics. "We're continuing that with Superior, the finest upholstery vinyl offered to the marine industry." ([706-529-2241/www.infinitylvv.com](http://706-529-2241/www.infinitylvv.com))

## EasyLift

Dowco's patent-pending EasyLift Bimini top makes it easy to raise and lower your pontoon Bimini from the radar position to the trailering or storage position. Simply release the fastener holding the stowed Bimini top to the rail and the top raises itself with a gentle lifting motion. Built-in gas springs do all the lifting. To return to the stow position, release the lock handle and gently lower the canopy back to the storage position.



This new EasyLift impressed the IBEX judges too last fall when Dowco earned the prestigious Innovation Award for its latest product. ([www.dowcomarine.com](http://www.dowcomarine.com))

## Who Said It?

### Quotes from this issue

"This boat has distinctly sporty pickup to back up the edgy profile, and this makes for a fun time on the water."—Page 24

"We tend to call it the 'ah-ha moment.' You can talk about it but until people really get their hands on it, it's hard to understand."—Page 30

"The goal is to convert non-Mercury people into Mercury people."—Page 48

## Five Fun Facts About Bull Shoals Lake

According to [Arkansas.com](http://Arkansas.com), here are five things you might not know about Bull Shoals Lake.



1. Bull Shoals Dam is the fifth largest concrete dam in the nation.
2. In November, many anglers submerge Christmas trees to lure fish like crappie to the large piles of brush.
3. Scuba divers from many different places are known to dive at Bull Shoals, where they spear scaled rough fish and enjoy the clear water.
4. Bull Shoals Lake has around 45,500 surface acres.
5. Over 20 parks are sheltered along the lake's edge, developed by federal, state and local agencies.

## BoatUS's Golden Anniversary

BoatUS has been a big part of the industry since its inception in 1966 when Founder Richard Schwartz saw a need to make recreational boaters' lives better.



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The carbon-free, 100 percent rubber out-soles are boat-safe, non-marking, and help maintain grip on slick surfaces. The Dunes flip flops retail for \$45. (855-637-2700/www.harimari.com) 

## Free Guide To LED Lighting

With so many LED products on the market, it can be confusing and overwhelming for boat owners. Whether thinking about which LED lamp to buy or to simply learn more about the technology in general, users can now download "10 Things to Consider When Purchasing LED Lighting" from Hella marine.

The free 20-page booklet offers ten factors to consider before making a purchase, ranging from light output to cost and everything in between. Full-color images, diagrams and charts better illustrate the key points.

Hella marine lamps are fit-and-forget by design, offering complete peace of mind and safety at sea. (770-631-7500/www.hellamarine.com) 



## New 2-Speed Spinning Reels

Carrot Stix is expanding past fishing rods with their new 2-Speed spinning reels that offer on-the-fly shifting ability for anglers to change from a 4.7:1 to 6.7:1 gear ratio in their 2000 series.

Being able to shift gears on the fly is a game changer, having the option when you are fighting the fish lets you have better control and this means more catches are landed. (www.carrotstix.com) 



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## From the Forums

### Two-Stroke vs. Four-Stroke

Excerpts from recent *PDB* forum exchanges at [www.pdbmagazine.com/forum](http://www.pdbmagazine.com/forum)

A member recently posed the never-ending question, "Which do you prefer, two-strokes or four-strokes?"

**[Captain Tony]:** Two-stroke: lighter weight, more torque, quicker hole shot, simpler fueling, no oil changes/filters, sweeter sound, less cost to buy, lower maintenance, easier to repair, newer ones have less smoke and quieter sound and easy winterization! Tell me what I'm missing.

Four-stroke: more power, very quiet, good mid-range, strong top end, like a car engine, no mixing or separate oil tank refill, need to winterize differently but efficient, better GPH fuel efficiency! Tell me what I'm missing.

**[I.M.H.O]:** I like the four-stroke for my Waverunners (even though many older

two-strokes were faster), but I like the Direct Fuel Injected two-strokes for my 'toon because of the weight and torque factors.

**[Moser]:** I like my older two-strokes because they are basically bulletproof and easy to work on. I say they are bulletproof because they are nearly impossible to wear out. I have a friend in the marine service business who runs mid-80's Force motors on his fishing boat and pontoon. He likes to say, "Two-strokes never die, you have to kill them." The reasoning behind this statement is that if you take care of these motors they will run virtually forever.

To break one you have to mess up the oil blend, let it get hot, lean the fuel out with dirty carbs or use a weak fuel pump. Basically some system has to not



work right for them to fail. If everything is working like it should, a two-strokes rotating apparatus will rotate for many thousands of hours.

**[RBI]:** I'm by far a mechanic to talk about the pros and cons, but what I can say is most boaters working on their engines in the middle of the launch ramp are two-strokers. When they finally get it going and the blue wall of smoke resides, you can breathe again. I enjoy my four-stroke Merc. It's quiet and it starts when you turn the key. But it is still a free country and have what your heart desires.

There are a lot of pros and cons out there, so join our friends at [www.pdbmagazine.com/pontoonforum](http://www.pdbmagazine.com/pontoonforum) and share your opinion. 🦄

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## Reader Submission Photo

Denny and Angel Barnett loved taking Matthew Barnett and Sydnee Lepak exploring on Canyon Lake, Ariz., in this "loaner" Bennington Q25 while they waited for their own Bennington to be delivered.



Share your favorite shots on our Facebook page and yours could be picked for our next issue of *PDB*! View more recent submissions by clicking the button in our digital issue.

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## WHERE'S THE PADDLE?



The first ten people who find the paddle hidden inside *PDB* magazine will

have their names included in an upcoming issue! In the January Buyer's Guide, the paddle was in the photo on page 31, right above the blue jacket. Here are the quickest spotters:

|                           |                     |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Jodi Sargent              | Maple Grove, Minn.  |
| Jim & Jan Donald          | Mooresville, N.C.   |
| Ken Braun                 | Hartford, Wis.      |
| Mark Hayes                | Madison Lake, Minn. |
| Randy & Jan Kloepper      | Coon Rapids, Minn.  |
| Gary & Peggy Fillion      | Sandy Hook, Conn.   |
| Ralph & Genevieve Ehrhart | Jerseyville, Ill.   |
| John Lendel               | Three Rivers, Mich. |
| Randy Holmes              | Pekin, Ill.         |
| Jim Brignolio             | Manteca, Calif.     |

As soon as you see the paddle, email your name, your hometown, and its location to [paddle@pdbmagazine.com](mailto:paddle@pdbmagazine.com). Good luck!



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# <sup>PDB</sup> Spotlight

By Austa Cook

ON THE INDUSTRY'S BEST BOATS

# Back In Black

Black is back with JC's new 28 SportToon RFL Midnight Shadow edition, and it's never looked better. With black rails, pods, and helm cap, this pontoon sports a classy and edgy look that draws attention to some fantastic new features onboard.

You've got stainless steel flashing everywhere, from the entry gates to the 10-foot Bimini hardware, bow rails, cleats, cupholders, boarding ladder, docking lights, and the hinges on the loungers' foldable armrests. This model also sports a standard air horn on the front of the boat, a cocktail table with an adjustable leg, and Seagrass flooring that's adhesive-free with one piece stretched and stapled securely in place. If carpet is more your thing, JC also has the 36-ounce carpet as an option.

## As Tested

One big feature that's been reinvented is the new black powder-coated wake tower, which was an option on the model we recently tested. With the performance capabilities to this baby, you're definitely going to get your money's worth. The 28 SportToon is a big boat—its overall length caps out at 28 feet,





# JC's 28 SportToon RFL Midnight Shadow Edition

7 inches—and for such room, we expected this to have a small effect on the performance. Boy were we wrong.

We jumped onto plane with thrilling speed, and cutting tight corners was smooth and effortless. With such powerful acceleration, the 28 SportToon can really bank and the ride is exhilarating. This boat has distinctly sporty pickup to back up the edgy profile, and this makes for a fun time on the water.



## For The Captain

While we're behind the wheel, let's go into a little more detail about the helm. The console is loaded with goodies. The stereo system on the model we tested had a CMD8 Clarion CD player with optional iPod hookup, Sirius satellite, and Bluetooth capabilities, though we would have liked to see an Auxiliary jack. The Garmin echoMAP 53 LakeVu HD is an especially nice touch, and if you go for the tower speakers, you can have two dial toggle switches to work all the radio controls at the helm with ease.

## Cool As A Breeze

Also on the dash, we noticed two switches labeled Misting Zone 1 and Misting Zone 2.





You guessed it: this boat had a built-in misting system not only in the Bimini top, but built into the seats as well to cool off the flooring. Those unobtrusive small black spots I was trying to figure out were actually nozzles!

But just wait. It gets better. The high-back captain's chair seemed unusually roomy, and that's because it is. At 31 inches wide, this plush reclining chair offers extra comfort for anyone who wants to upgrade. Another option is the companion chair with a leg lift, so your co-captain can kick back and relax by getting his or her feet off the floor.

## The Right Touch

All of the upholstery has just been switched to Omnova, a vinyl with an even softer texture that's easier to clean and very resistant to stains. As always, the upholstery trim package inside covers up the panels and helps with sun-deadening, and the rear-facing loungers are smooth to the touch and beautifully accented with silvery swashes of color. After a closer look, we noticed a switch on each side of the loungers, and here's a surprise that further shows the luxury side of this model—each lounge is powered to raise the back higher or lower. There's also a 12-volt and lit USB outlet for phones on each side. Reclining back here, you'll find you're nicely shaded by the Bimini, which now has a heavy-duty one-inch rod as well as an optional one-and-a-quarter-inch rod that JC puts in all its towers.

## In The Aft

Moving back towards the swim platform, you'll discover there's another new addition in the stern, and that's the optional powder-coated dual swim platforms with a telescoping ladder on one or both sides. A stainless steel holder is set up to contain your fenders, which is a nice touch, and there are also two cup holders on each side of the swim platforms—which rounds out the total number of cup holders to a whopping 26!

There's one more feature I couldn't go without mentioning. Thanks to its exclusive with JL Audio, JC has its new 8.8 speakers underneath the





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benches and hooked up to the tower in the back. We discovered this fact while casually turning on some music to get a feel for the speaker system.

Um, wow. Once again, we were blown away. This model has an incredible sound system. With six speakers placed strategically along the length of the boat and those big tower speakers pointed towards the people you're towing on a wakeboard or tube, no one is left out from enjoying the blast of tunes over the white noise of rushing water. These JL speakers also come with optional amber LED lighting behind them, so they give a warm glow at night. Don't get me wrong, I love the vivacity of the cool-toned LEDs most commonly seen, but there's something equally special about the unique touch of amber that contrasts beautifully with the blue underwater stern lights.

## Finishing Touches

To tie off all these creature comforts with a bow, there are even more options like the movable cupholders, Porta Potti, and Sundeck with a changing room. Watersports lovers, you'll appreciate the automatic bilge pump inside the optional ski locker that keeps the water out. The remote stereo control, ski mirror, and slide-out bow lounge extensions are just the icing on top.



Taken in all together, with all the options complementing the thoughtfully designed standards, it's no wonder this pontoon is so full of

surprises. After having the pleasure of riding onboard, it has to be said—the 28 SportToon RFL is the definition of sporty luxury. 🏆



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# *Better Than Leather?*

## Why top manufacturers *love* this product

By Vanessa Santoro

**When I first opened the gate and stepped onto Premier's Dodici 310, I couldn't help but immediately start running in all directions to check out every square inch.** All 33.5 feet of deck space resplendent with red and black colors were hard to take in without backing up a few steps, because its profile just filled my vision. I casually ran a hand along the back of a lounge while I explored—and stopped dead.

What was that? Leather on a boat?

I know I'm still a youngun' when it comes to boats, but I knew enough to realize how special this upholstery was. Somewhat baffled, I had to slide my hand over it again and again to try to figure out the mystery, calling over my co-workers to help me nail exactly what I was feeling, but none of us

knew for sure. My eyeballs were probably drying out because I was staring so much.

I knew I had to get to the bottom of this wonder, so I looked up the Dodici's specs to see what kind of vinyl they so wisely used on their newest models. Heritage Collection was the name, durable comfort was the game, and one of the main reasons it was so distinctly soft was thanks to the use of Takumi Technology. Who owns and utilizes fabric with Takumi Technology for these high-brand pontoon names? That would be high-performance polyurethane fabric manufacturer Ultrafabrics.

### Innovation

Ultrafabrics is what I consider to be the magician behind the curtain, the

talented and innovative force that has raised high performance fabrics to Everest-like heights. I was able to talk with AR Swan, the marketing manager at Ultrafabrics, to find out more about its products. When I told him about my experience on the Dodici, he had to chuckle.

"We tend to call it the 'ah-ha moment,'" he said. "It's really amazing; you can talk about it but until people really get their hands on it, it's hard to understand."

Ultrafabrics has designed about 20 different collections of high-performance polyurethane fabrics to date, four of which are UV-durable marine-grade indoor/outdoor category collections, and the color combinations within these collections are virtually infinite.





"We're known for custom work as well," Swan explains. "A boat manufacturer can say, 'Our corporate color is blue but you don't have this blue in open line,' and we could match it."

And take it from me personally: each is more satiny, chic and silken than the last. You know the saying, "Smooth as a baby's bottom?" It should be, "Smooth as an Ultrafabrics product," and I'm not even joking. There are not enough words in our vocabulary to describe what these collections feel like.

## How Do They Do It?

So what is this Takumi Technology and how exactly does it make these fabrics so soft that I daresay they blow leather out of the water?

Takumi means "artisan" in Japanese and involves a four-layer process of manufacturing. The four layers include the substrate, microfoam, topskin, and protective surface layers which, taken together, make up an entirely unique fabric in terms of durable performance, touch, ease of care, thermal comfort and dimensional stability.

"That's the one thing that really sets us apart because no one else can do that," says Swan.

One of the common misconceptions Ultrafabrics faces is the idea that there's no big difference between polyurethane and vinyl, or even between different polyurethane fabrics. But let me tell you, there is a world of difference. Ultrafabrics crafts its polyurethane fabrics with a polycarbonate resin and doesn't include any plastics, chemicals or heavy metals like many PVC vinyls do. They don't off-gas and as a petroleum-based product, they're about as green as you can be, recycling about 99 percent of the solvents used in manufacturing.

"When you touch a vinyl, you know it's a vinyl," explains Swan. "It's got that rigid, hard top, almost like a layer of cardboard. And even with some of the other polyurethane manufacturers, they get closer at being softer than vinyl, but they really just don't have that hand. The performance attributes that we have really don't compare with any other companies that do it."





## Not Just For Boats

Though you're most likely to find these fabrics on higher-end pontoons or deck boats, you've probably come into contact with Ultrafabrics at some point in your life, because those other 15 collections are hard at work in industries across the board. With anti-microbial collections in high-traffic areas like spas and dentist chairs and ink-and-stain collections in corporate and hospitality, this company is truly solution-based.

"Besides marine we're in automotive, OEM manufacturing, bus and heavy-duty trucking, commercial and corporate jets... I mean the performance attributes really hold up," Swan explains. "Basically anything you can upholster, we can be on."

In the marine world, these higher-end, high performance fabrics debuted on yachts, super yachts and sailboats. As fishing boat and center console boat manufacturers started looking for a harder-wearing, more durable product, they also approached Ultrafabrics. Before the company knew it, pontoon manufacturers were coming not long after that, no doubt drawn to a brilliant idea they didn't want to miss out on.







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## Go Vintage

Do you think it ends there? It doesn't! What I saw on Premier's Dodici model was the leather look that Ultrafabrics is so adept at crafting, but they also make vintage distressed-looking leather-like fabric and can even mimic the look of textiles. They've also been making a suede-like fabric that people think is the real deal but turns out to be even better, thanks to the performance benefits.

"We do more than that leather look and the new stuff's really amazing because it holds up just as well, but you can get completely different looks," says Swan. "Especially when you're talking about high-end boats and the interiors of yachts or some of the other different markets, it's a really unique look that's not out there anywhere else. It's an amazing product."

## Pink?

And one of the best things that distinguish Ultrafabrics from other upholstery alternatives is that there is no pinking. What is pinking, you may ask? Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) products tend to dechlorinate and chemically break down over time, creating an unsightly mold that looks pink. But because Ultrafabrics doesn't manufacture any PVC products, there is absolutely no fear of this odd phenomenon taking over your boating furniture. In this way (as in others), they are very, very different from any vinyls out there.

"You get the high-performance with us, you get the unbelievable hand, but you're not going to get what's kind of the hot topic now, the pinking phenomenon, because we're not a PVC, we don't have those stabilizers and different things that are put in PVC," Swan explains.

And yes, they can prove it to you.

"It's one of those things where it's really not your grandmother's polyurethane," he laughingly adds.

Amen to that. With fabrics that feel softer than rose petals, baby lambs and chinchilla fur combined, have unbelievable marine-tough performance, and boast more colors than an Andy Warhol print, I honestly don't think you can beat Ultrafabrics. So this is my invitation: climb aboard high class models like the Dodici to find your own "ah-ha moment" and experience how Ultrafabrics takes a luxury pontoon to the next level. 



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# BEHIND THE SCENES

## WHAT THE CAMERAS DON'T CATCH

As you flip through manufacturer brochures, websites and even the pages of *PDB* magazine, have you ever noticed how much fun the people in the boats are having? You may be looking for a couple of photos or videos of a pontoon or deck boat you're most interested in buying, but what you get is a glimpse into the boating lifestyle with models smiling and having a great time.

It can be a cold wintry day, but seeing those happy people fishing or getting ready to pull a wakeboarder seems to warm you up a little and in your mind—maybe just for a moment—it's as if you're sitting in the boat with them on a beautiful summer afternoon.

Promoting the lifestyle and the endless possibilities of boat ownership is one of the main reasons why manufacturers spend so much time and effort to capture inviting photos and videos of the boats they build.

It's not as easy as it might look since photo shoots include long hours, multiple days and a variety of challenges including weather, boat availability and finding the right locations.

For those who have been involved in the business a long time like Mike Menne, Captain and

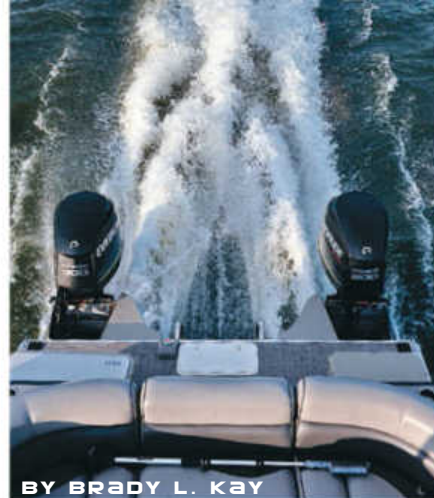


founder of Strait Productions, it's more than just a career, it's a passion.

Menne started working photo shoots at the age of 15, which led him to where he is today. With over 20 years in the business it was only a matter of time until he branched out on his own to start Strait Productions. From sourcing photographers and videographers to securing production crew and location resources, there is nothing he can't do.

"It's amazing work that we are able to create on the water and onlookers are always amazed at what we do," says Menne. "It takes a lot of complicated behind the scenes work to produce high-quality photography and video. When you add water to the equation it takes a team of seasoned experts and the right gear to get the job done."

Included in that list of proper gear is the Strait Productions photo boat that has been engineered and designed to put Menne and his team in position to get the photos and videos they need to capture the boating lifestyle.



BY BRADY L. KAY

## PREMIER PONTOONS

The process of building the ultimate photo boat starts with a solid foundation and that's why the new shooting boat for Menne started with a 2016 model that was built by Premier.

"It is the third shooting boat that we have built and it's close to perfection with each one getting a little better and it's one of the best photo boats in the country," says Menne. "It's a solid platform totally designed around shooting and it can accommodate a crew of up to 10 on the water. It's powered by twin 300's so the pontoon can chase down almost any boat on the water. Working with a high-quality boat builder allowed us to build a well-built and high quality shooting platform."

The PTX performance package gives the boat its ability to perform while hauling a full crew. But this is more than just a great-performing pontoon; it also has what the production company needs to get the job done.

### STRAIT PRODUCTION CLIENTS:

- Alumacraft
- Bass Pro Shops
- BRP
- Cabala's
- Carver Yachts
- Evinrude
- Full Throttle
- Larson Boats
- Larson Escape
- Larson FX
- Leisure Pontoons
- Marquis Yachts
- Onyx
- Palm Beach Pontoons
- Premier Pontoons
- Regency
- Sea Legs
- Sun Tracker
- Striper
- Tahoe
- Tracker Boats
- Triumph
- Vantage
- West Marine
- Weeres Pontoons





"Premier has perfected the art of electronics, gear storage and having the most comfortable furniture to operate on," adds Menne.

## EVINRUDE OUTBOARDS

The power for the boat comes from twin Evinrude 300 E-TEC outboards. As the on-water crew size grew to include both photo and video production, it was important for Menne to have the power to keep up with his subject boats. This meant powering the shooting boat to be fast with a high top speed with quick and powerful acceleration. The twin 300 E-TECs do just that.

"Its instant acceleration has power to accelerate through the entire power band for speeds up to 60 mph," boasts Menne. "What is more amazing is how quickly it gets to 35 mph with a full crew of shooters and a full gear load."

## WET SOUNDS

When it come to audio there is loud and then there is Wet Sounds. These speakers produce amazing crystal-clear sound across far distances, but it wasn't the audio Menne was after. It was the ability to communicate with the photo team, video producer, agency, and models/talent on the water with the WS-420 system that includes a built-in microphone.

"We took a pair of Wet Sounds REV 10 speakers and combined an EQ with a Talk Back Microphone to give us the loudest PA on the water," explains Menne.

## VANTAGE PROTECTION PRODUCTS

While boat construction and power is key, so is the ability to protect it from hundreds of hours of wear and tear. Vantage has the products to help keep the photo boat looking new.

"We started with protecting the tubes with 18-inch Vantage protection film. This kept the tubes protected from the water line up to the top," says Menne. "We then coated the interior with their vinyl/flooring nano protection products to keep interior wear minimal. The result was a boat that looks like new after 74



*Mike Menne has been working on photo shoots since he was 15.*



days (over 1,332 hours) in the water in a single season."

## SEASTAR

When you have a work boat that houses a big crew and tons of gear you need to be in control at all times.

"Whether it's chasing down a performance boat, passing inches on a running shot, or moving sideways—YES, sideways—SeaStar's Optimus 360 joystick steering system has us covered," says Menne. "This allows the boat to move in any direction we need it to go with the push or twist of your fingers. The control and maneuverability is nothing short of amazing."

Using a synced throttle makes high speed moves simple for Menne and its low speed maneuverability puts the photo and video teams in the right place every time.

## XTREME LED LIGHTING

Strait Productions shoot from sunrise to sunset during the longest days of the year. To get the crew out in the best light they often work in the dark, navigating to locations and loading the gear on and off the shooting boat.

"With the flip of a few switches we can light the interior and exterior of the boat with 210 LEDs that produce over

53,148 lumens of light," says Menne.

"The lighting quickly makes night turn to day and allows us to navigate safely and be set up before the sunrise. It gives us the lighting we need to operate at all hours of the day. Our lights have even been known to help produce some photo/video light on those dark and dreary days."

## ON THE WATER

With a long list of clients that is continuing to grow each year, chances are good that at some point you may see Menne and his Strait Productions crew out on this photo boat. Of course if you do see him that means you're probably in a great area since a lot of planning goes into each shoot.

"When I plan a shoot I don't just show up with the shooting boat, props, trucks and gear," explains Menne. "It's about scouting the best locations, finding the best models and working with the best people to capture the shots that our clients need to market their products."

With that kind of dedication, it's no wonder Strait Productions continues to get the call when the need arises for a professional shoot. We all like seeing happy people on boats, which just happens to be Menne's specialty. 

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**Evinrude**  
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**Premier Pontoons**  
[www.pontoons.com](http://www.pontoons.com)

**SeaStar Solutions**  
[www.seastarsolutions.com](http://www.seastarsolutions.com)

**Strait Productions**  
[www.straitproductions.com](http://www.straitproductions.com)

**Vantage**  
[www.vantageprotectionproducts.com](http://www.vantageprotectionproducts.com)

**Wet Sounds**  
[www.wetsounds.com](http://www.wetsounds.com)

**Xtreme LED Lighting**  
[www.xtremetruckgear.com](http://www.xtremetruckgear.com)







BY TREVOR MASON

# THE MORE YOU TOW

## TIPS TO MAKE YOUR TOWING TROUBLE-FREE

**There's more to buying a boat than the act of buying itself.** Not to say that's a minor part, of course, but a lot of factors will come into play. Some of those are things you won't see coming, things that even we, the wise sages of pontooning, can't account for (like a murder of crows descending on your parked boat and destroying the cover and upholstery. *This has actually happened*). There are some things, though, that we can anticipate. One of those is actually pretty simple, but

it's something that could potentially get overlooked if you're not careful. Are you prepared to haul a boat?

Not everyone is going to be in a position to pull a trailered boat, whether that's because you plain don't have a vehicle that's equipped with a hitch or because your rig has seen better days and may not be up to the challenge. Either way, consider this a quick guide to get you up to speed on the things you need to consider when it comes to getting trailer-ready.







We talked to Bryatt Fischer, head of marketing at Bullet Proof Diesel out of Mesa, Ariz., to get some pointers on how to prepare for towing your boat. Bullet Proof specializes in Ford 6.0L Power Stroke diesels, so they know what it takes to make a truck a mean, green towing machine.

## ROLLING ON THE RIVER

One of the simplest places to start is your tires. The very first thing to check is your tire pressure, both on your vehicle and on the trailer. Every vehicle is rated differently, so check your manufacturer's directions to find the right numbers to hit. I know we all ignore that tire pressure warning light that seems to always show up on our instrument panel, but when you're towing something, that's when things especially need to be running in the optimal range. Next, what kind of shape are the tires in? Check for wear and cracking. You also need to check the load rating on your tires. That rating has to do with the load you're expecting to tow, not just the weight of your vehicle. If your vehicle weighs 6,000 pounds, your tires need to be able to handle way more than that, once you add the weight of your boat and trailer.

## WEIGHT A MINUTE

This is a good time to talk about the general weight ratings for your vehicle. There are various factors that determine what you can safely tow. I'm going to go ahead and burst your bubble right now: if you're planning on using a minivan or small two-wheel drive truck to pull your boat, you're gonna have a hard time. The US Department of Transportation classifies trucks (and the like) into eight classes by Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR). The GVWR is a measure of how much your truck can carry while driving including the weight of the truck itself, but excluding the trailer. There is another measurement called the Gross Combined Weight Rating (GCWR), which is basically the GVWR plus your trailer.

The classes of GVWR that we're focusing on here are Class 1 and Class 2. Classes 3-8 concern much larger vehicles that are for the most part specifically designed for freight, so don't worry about those. Class 1, at 6,000 pounds or less, includes minivans, SUVs, and light pickup trucks like Tacomas, Frontiers or Rangers. With most pontoons clocking in around 2,000 pounds, and these vehicles weighing around 4,000 pounds, you see that you're already

over that limit. Class 2 vehicles can pull between 6,000 and 10,000 pounds. This is where most people's towing vehicles will live, such as your Silverados, Suburbans, F150s and F250s, and RAM 1500s and 2500s.

Let's touch briefly on a few other considerations: payload capacity, towing capacity and tongue weight. Payload capacity is how much the truck can haul in its bed and cabin. Towing capacity is pretty straightforward: it's how much it can pull in a trailer. Tongue weight is a measurement of how much force the tongue of the trailer exerts on your hitch. For most conventional trailers, you want that to be around 10 to 15 percent of the total trailer weight. Make sure the weight of everything you're towing is within the manufacturer's specifications and you'll be good to go.

## PLAYING IN TUNE

Give your truck a tune-up! It's probably been a while and it needs the sprucing up. This is just like getting a physical at the doctor: you're making sure your vehicle can handle the stress you're about to throw at it. If there are problems with any of the belts, the oil pressure, the coolant levels, etc., it's going to be even worse with your boat behind you. Bryatt says, "There's a lot of strain and extra workload, so is your engine equipped for it? You need to make sure your oil cooling stays in check because there will be a lot of added heat as your engine works harder to compensate and pull harder and add more torque."

It's also a good idea to use a data monitor to see what your truck's normal operating range is in. You can then use that data to make sure things are behaving properly while you're on your trip. This may require a fair bit of driving, both with and without a trailer, to get enough information. Hey, who ever said that it was easy to have fun?

Finally, make sure that your exterior lights, both on the vehicle and the trailer, are working properly. It's dangerous to pull a trailer without letting the people behind you anticipate what you're about to do.

Follow these tips, and you'll be prepared for anything the road has to throw at you. Except for those crows. Watch out for those crows. 



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# Just For Boaters

## Where to find used equipment

**W**hen it comes to buying and selling general items ranging from couches to baseball cards, popular websites like craigslist or eBay are probably your best option. But for boaters, where is the best place to find used boating equipment? For years that was one mystery that appeared to be unsolvable, but thanks to Mike Hobson, the founder of **UsedBoatEquipment.com**, boaters now have a website of their own.

"We just finished our fourth year at the Annapolis Boat Show where we had many people tell us they had either sold something or bought something through our site, so we are seeing growth and market acceptance," says Hobson. "In 2007 I started MyBoatsGear.com, a boating product review site and it was conceived to give boaters independent reviews of boating equipment. But during the following years we started hearing from users, 'How can we sell our old gear before buying new?'"

Realizing almost every boater has a piece of old equipment lying around, Hobson began investigating existing options and found nothing substantial in the marine market.

"You have eBay or craigslist, but none of the options

really addressed the boating market and we came to the conclusion the marine market deserved its own resource," adds the founder.

The next step was to investigate and create possible platforms. Hobson started by creating UsedBoatEquipment.com with a categories structure.

"We needed to allow for all equipment to be found on pontoon and deck boats for example, such as anchors, grills, boat lifts, tables, ladders, steering, electronics, engines, navigation equipment, safety, inflatables, water sports, etc.," says Hobson. "By encouraging everyone who has equipment lying in basements, garages and boatyards to list them, we make it possible for someone who needs it to buy it."

### Major Benefits

One of the biggest advantages to the boating-specific website is the category structure rather than relying on a keyword search.

"If you type the word anchor into eBay's search bar you'll end up with charm bracelets, wall anchors, etc. Try 'cateye tube,' as in a towable tube, and you get lights and jewelry," explains Hobson. "Neither search brings up what you want. The point is that eBay uses keywords and unless you use the





same keywords as the seller, you won't find the item you're looking for. As a seller your items may not get found and therefore sold."

This is the reason Hobson went with a category structure like you would find at West Marine and other online stores.

## How It Works

**UsedBoatEquipment.com** works like traditional classifieds and the cost to post is \$4 for 60 days with no commissions or other costs included. In fact, if the item is under \$100 you can post it for free.

"We have found that because we specialize in boating we have a smaller group and a social group and in some cases we have had buyers and sellers become friends," says Hobson.

## Getting Started

The listings include a form to fill out, which contains fields relevant to the category. For example, if selling an outboard you'll be asked for shaft length, fuel type, horsepower, etc. If you're selling an anchor you'll be asked for the weight, type of material, and so forth. This helps the seller get the right information into the listing rather than just a blank listing box.

"This also helps your search so if a potential buyer is typing in a browser for an outboard with your horsepower and shaft length, your ad will come up," says Hobson. "That's why we as the boating market need a resource which is more closely focused on our needs. Our goal is to get as much equipment out of storage and online as it will help many boaters and make the sellers money."

## Examples

Anchors and mooring equipment, stoves and grills, boat covers and bimini tops, boat lifts, dock boxes, engines and outboards, fuel filters, fishing gear, deck equipment ladders, cleats, tables, ramps, steering, plumbing equipment, navigation and autopilots, maintenance, safety gear, watersport toys, cateye tubes, canoes, kayaks, and more have been bought and sold recently on the website.

"One of our members recounted that he put his old Autohelm autopilot from the mid 1980's on the site and ended up selling parts to two separate people extending the life of their Autohelm units," says Hobson. "This made him some money and he helped a couple of fellow boaters, which made him happy."

Looking to buy or sell used boating equipment but don't know where to start? Well, now you do. 

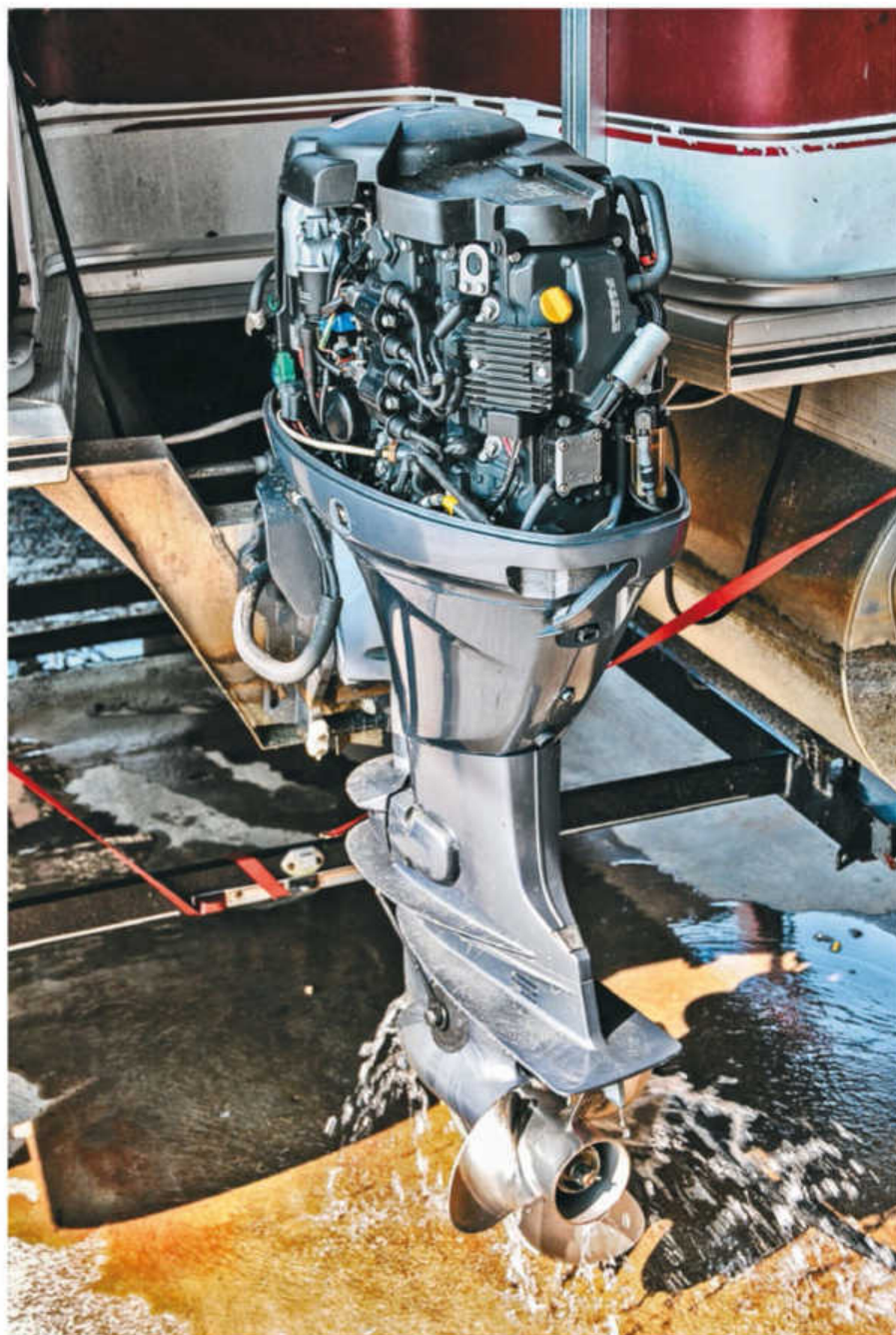




# PDB Maintenance Checkup

GETTING READY FOR SUMMER! — By John Tiger —

## Spring Commissioning



### System By System

It may be easier to tackle the project if you divvy it up by systems—steering, fuel, engine, drive, cooling, etc. It'll go faster this way, and there's less chance to forget something important. There's also cleaning and polishing to finish off after the systems checkups are complete.

### Uncover & Visual Check-Over

For those who have covered the boat up over the winter months, the first step is to check carefully for bees' nests and other potential dangers (skunks, snakes, cats, etc.) before pulling the cover off. If you've waited until it's late spring, as the temperature warms, there's more potential for bees and other critters inside. Pulling the cover off will reveal what needs to be done from the outside in. Before the cleanup commences, it's best to go through the rig and engine looking for problems. Even though your visual inspection may not have revealed critters, take a second look for small bees' nests—often times, bees will make small, almost undetectable nests in near-impossible locations. These little nests are most often ones that will cause problems for you out on the water; for example, in the overboard tell-tale water indicator on an outboard, in the water intakes, and in the fuel tank vent outlet. If you find any of these "mud dauber" nests, clear them out completely before going boating.

**Getting your rig ready for another season's use is one of the joys of springtime.** Lots of great emotions are awakened; it's a heady time, as the possibilities for new boating adventures seem endless. Making sure your boat is ready for all the fun is a great responsibility. Even

if you're Johnny-on-the-spot when it comes to winterizing, there's still a lot to be done to ensure trouble-free outings before that first launch. On the other hand, if your winterizing regimen leaves a lot to be desired, now's the time to correct all of last fall's mistakes.

### Steering & Controls

Steering and shift/throttle controls are not only critical to driving the boat, but think about this: not checking and maintaining them could make you liable in case of an accident. Therefore, they should be your first



priority. For cable systems, ensure they work smoothly, operate properly and are lubricated with marine-grade grease. Hydraulic steering systems should be properly bled to purge air bubbles, and checked to ensure that they work properly. Shift and throttle should be checked with the engine running on a flusher, or in the water tied to the dock; make sure the engine shifts into forward and reverse from neutral and back again. Make sure the propeller stops rotating when the engine is shifted to neutral. If checking on a flusher, it's much safer to remove the propeller for this check; you will still be able to see the propeller shaft rotating as you shift into and out of gear.

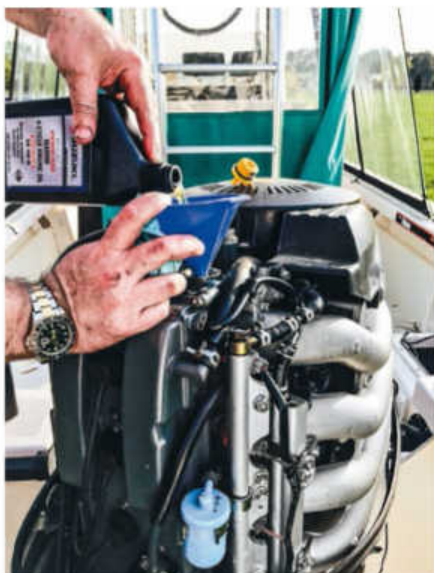
## Fuel System

The engine can't run if it can't get fuel. Fuel system checking and maintenance has never been more important thanks to the havoc that alcohol-extended fuels can wreak on fuel lines, filters and components. If the fuel lines are older than three years, they should be replaced with new EPA-compliant hose and new clamps. Look at the fuel hoses carefully; if they're chalky in appearance and leave residue on your hands when you touch them, it's a safe bet they need to be replaced. The innards of older fuel hoses are highly susceptible to alcohol deterioration, and if left unchecked can cause clogging, poor running and even engine failure. The fuel filter should be replaced as well. If your rig doesn't have a water-separating fuel filter, now's a good time to add one. Check the primer bulb if your rig has one; these are damaged by alcohol-extended fuels too. Finally, check the tank carefully for leaks, cracks and loose mounting.

## Batteries & Electrical System

The battery(s) should be charged and checked to ensure it will hold a charge. The terminals and cable ends should be cleaned and checked for tightness. A visual once-over to ensure that it's secured and can't tip over is good practice. Lights, bilge pump, horn, gauges and all other accessories should be checked for proper operation and repaired if necessary.

*If you didn't change the oil last fall, it's imperative to do it before launching in spring.*



*If you didn't replace the water pump in the fall, it might be time to check it. This one shows all the impeller vanes permanently bent over; time for a new one.*

*Certainly the battery will need a full charging, as well as electrolyte topped off.*



*Propellers must be removed and propshafts checked for fish line snarls.*

*Fuel filters should be changed before the start of the season. Here, old fuel is being poured out so it can be checked for water contamination.*



*Engines should be run on land, using a flush attachment, before bringing the boat to the ramp. This way, it can be determined that the engine at least starts, runs, shifts and cools properly before the maiden voyage.*



## Engine Operation

Stern drives must have the block water plugs replaced in their proper locations before running the engine. Belts and hoses should be checked for tightness and cracks. If it wasn't changed in the fall, the engine oil and filter should be changed now (and don't forget next fall!). The engine should be connected to a water source (with a flush muff or similar device) and started; it should be allowed to reach operating temperature while running at idle, while checking for proper cooling (the telltale water stream from the engine) and water leaks. All fittings (tilt tube, swivel bracket, hood latches, etc.) should be greased. The gearcase should be checked for damage along with the propeller and propeller shaft. If it wasn't done in the fall, the gear case lube should be drained, checked for contamination (milky equals water ingestion and seal failure; dark and stinky equals potential gear and bearing damage) and refilled with fresh lubricant. Any corrosion should be sanded down, prepped and repainted. The entire engine should be given a coat of wax to protect it from the water and sun.

## Hull Inspection

Check the boat topsides carefully for cracks, loose rubrail or cleats, or a damaged windshield or frame. Next, it has to be done: climb under the trailer and inspect every inch of the hull. You might be surprised at what you find. Aluminum pontoons, decks and hulls must be checked for cracks, impact damage, missing and loose rivets, and broken welds. For fiberglass hulls, nicks, chips and dings (especially those through the gelcoat and into the fiberglass) should be repaired before the season starts. While you're under there, check the trailer for rust, broken welds, rotted bunks, and deteriorating bunk carpet. Check the trailer lights and wiring and check the tires for weather checking and tread wear. Check the bearings and grease and change if necessary. The winch, tongue jack and coupler/safety chains must be checked as well.

## Gear

Lastly, your safety and sports gear should be cleaned, checked and stored. Fire extinguishers, lines (ropes), anchors, fenders, paddles, boat hooks, life vests and cushions, horns/whistles—a few hours minimum should be spent on these necessary “tools of the trade.” Replace any questionable items, clean and dry the rest and store.

## Hit The Lake

Don't forget to renew your boat and trailer registration! A ticket for expired tags is not a fun way to interrupt your first outing.

After a final wash down, you're ready for the water. A short shakedown cruise is best, to ensure everything's okay before taking a day cruise or a major trip. All that cleaning, checking and repairing should pay off; if you discover problems, however, now's the time to correct them—at home, with no pressure. **Happy Boating!**



*Gearcase lubricant must be checked and changed. If it's milky, like in this photo, the gearcase seals are leaking and should be replaced.*



*Hull damage, like that shown here, must be repaired as it will get worse and quite possibly pose a sinking threat. It's best to have a professional marina do these types of repairs.*

### About The Author

John Tiger, our newest PDB addition, has a lifetime of outboard engine experience as his background. He's owned over 70 boats and outboards since his first aluminum skiff at age 6; a former Evinrude/Johnson Master Technician, he's an expert at outboard rigging, troubleshooting, repair and rebuilding, as well as high-performance boat setup and propping. He's been providing outboard, boat and towing related stories for leading publications since 1992. 🐅





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# The Conversion Process

## What Mercury is doing to earn your business



**“W**hat kind of engine do you have on your boat? Why isn't it a Mercury? What can we do to change your mind?” That seems to be the question on everyone's mind over at Mercury. To that end, they've begun a series of consumer-focused events to

showcase the advantages of the Mercury brand over their competitors.





We spoke with Steve Fleming, director of communications at Mercury, and he told us about this fantastic new program they've started. According to Fleming, "We're conducting more than a dozen consumer-oriented events in the Fort Myers, Fla., area in conjunction with various different Mercury dealers. It's all based on getting consumers on the water. We feel certain that when we get people on the water, it's easy for them to make Mercury their choice. It goes through June and it's aimed at working with dealers to get consumers on boats with our engines."

## Power To The People

The idea is this: put on an event that showcases the strength of the Mercury line by having two identical boats



for consumers to use, one rigged with a Mercury engine, and the other with a competitor's engine.

"It's all about getting consumers on the boats," Fleming says. "We work with the dealers and they bring in their consumers, and we also advertise and talk to our contacts to bring people in. We'll record their responses and what they think, but the goal is to convert non-Mercury people into Mercury people—into Mercury boaters—and to reconfirm with existing Mercury boaters that they've got the right power on their boat."

That confidence is rooted in the success of products they've recently introduced, as well as a long history of providing what customers want. At the Miami International Boat Show last year, they introduced the 300hp Verado and the Mercury Racing Verado 400R, which are their two largest outboards ever. Later on in July, they introduced Active Trim, their



**PDB** Power Profile





automatic trim system, which has “been gangbusters since we put it out there,” Fleming says. What Active Trim does is help to maintain optimal trim across the speed range, which means you don’t have to keep adjusting the trim as your speed varies. The system is available on all Mercury and MerCruiser engines, from entry-level all the way up to premium. They also introduced 4.5L and 6.2L MerCruiser sterndrives in the 200-250 and 300-350 horsepower ranges.

“Sales have been good,” Fleming says, “and I think Mercury has done really well in the last ten years of introducing really innovative products that are extremely reliable and provide intuitive operation. I think you just can’t beat what we’ve done in the last couple years.”

## Fine Tuning

One of Mercury’s big selling points is its industry-leading corrosion protection. The outboard engines contain at least twice the amount of stainless steel as those of its competitors. They friction weld hardened steel to corrosion-fighting stainless steel, which ensures that saltwater only comes in contact with stainless steel. The corrosion warranty is supported by one of the largest dealer networks in the country.

The great strength of the Mercury line is the variety of outboards the engine manufacturer produces. Whatever your horsepower needs are, they have an engine to fit your boat. In fact, that’s part of the goal of the events they’re putting on. There’s such a wide variety of engines out there that they know they need to cater to everyone’s needs. That’s why, when we spoke with Fleming, the test boats they were using that weekend were rigged with 300hp Verados and a competitor’s 300hp, while at other events they will be featuring runabouts rigged with 115hp four-stroke engines.

## The Spice of Life

According to Fleming, “There’s a lot of variety of horsepower at these events. Most times, we use the horsepower ranges that are most sold by the dealers where we’re at. So if we’re at dealer that sells more offshore boats, they’re going to be 300-350hp. If we’re inshore, it’ll be the smaller horsepower. Usually there’s going to be something of each at every event.”

For starters, there’s the 75-115 horsepower range. The main draw of the 115hp is how lightweight it is. It comes in a full 20 pounds lighter than its nearest four-stroke competitor, which makes it the lightest low-emissions outboard on the market. Other features of this range are a bigger footprint, which gives you more leverage to control your boat and gets you onto plane more easily.

The 115hp is both quieter and smoother than the competition. At idle, it’s four decibels quieter and more than eight decibels quieter at full throttle, and at the transom the 115hp puts out five times less vibration.

What if you need a bigger engine? Mercury’s 150hp four-stroke has you covered. Just like its little brother, the 150hp is 20 pounds lighter than its closest competitor, and is just barely heavier than a two-stroke. It’s also the ideal engine for pontoons, especially if you’ve got

a swim platform. In fact, most of the boats we saw at our Shootout last year were sporting Mercury outboards. The 150hp is one of the easiest outboards to maintain on the market, with an easy-access fuel filter, no-spill oil change system, and a lifetime maintenance-free valve train. One neat feature that shows how committed they are to making things easy for owners is a QR code under the cowl that, once you scan it with your Smartphone, will take you to step-by-step video instructions.

What’s that, Papa Bear? That’s still not big enough for you? Well, you’re in luck, because that’s exactly what its Verado line is for. Available in a variety of configurations, from 175hp all the way up to 350hp, this is the engine you want when you really need extra power. But that power doesn’t come at the expense of your fuel economy. Verados are designed





to get up to 300 miles on a single tank of gas. They also feature Joystick Piloting, which gives you precise control over your boat's movements, so that docking is a breeze. Whatever direction you're going, the Verado turns on a dime to get you there. Finally, Mercury's Digital Throttle and Shift gives you instant throttle response and super smooth shifting.

## Reach Out And Touch Someone

We concluded our time with Steve by talking about how excited they are to bring their engines to people. He said, "You reach everybody one way or another. We're doing more than a dozen of these, so we're reaching a lot of people. It's a real beautiful area down here. There are a lot of different kinds of boaters, and Mercury has 31 different dealers in this area. This is an important and interesting Mercury project that's been conducted by the marketing and sales teams, but it involves everybody, including engineering and service. They all have a lot invested in this event. We're excited, the dealers are excited, and the customers that we've talked to are excited."

If you're even just a teensy bit interested in Mercury, head over to [www.themercuryedge.com](http://www.themercuryedge.com) and see when they'll be in your neck of the woods. Give things a go and see if your boat is ready to have the Mercury edge.

**For More Information:**

**Mercury Marine**

920-929-5040

[www.mercurymarine.com](http://www.mercurymarine.com)





**PRODUCT  
TEST**  
No. **196**

# DOWCO

## DowcoLok Fender Clip

The sad reality is the harder it is to do something, the less likely we're going to do it. Okay, so that doesn't apply to everything in life, but that statement feels true when it comes to putting out your boat fenders when approaching a dock. If I have to tie the rope around the rail and adjust the height each time, chances are good I'll just ask someone onboard to "keep me away from the dock" as I run into the marina store for ice.

That's why I'm a fan of products like this one from Dowco that I found while attending the Montego Bay dealer meeting last summer. The DowcoLok is a simple clip that allows you to instantly position your fenders and the provided strap allows you to easily adjust on the fly. It retails for \$24.99 and that's a price I can live with, especially if it saves my boat and my friendships.

—Brady L. Kay, PDB Editor



| GEAR       | 89    |
|------------|-------|
| Style      | 17/20 |
| Function   | 47/50 |
| Durability | 9/10  |
| Ease       | 9/10  |
| Price      | 7/10  |

800-404-5252  
www.dowcomarine.com

**PRODUCT  
TEST**  
No. **197**

# SECUR PRODUCTS

## Bluetooth Flashlight & Powerbank

Yep, you read that correctly. I never would have put the words Bluetooth and flashlight together in the same sentence, but for Secur Products it clearly works. Whether fishing, cruising, or just anchored in a cove, keeping gadgets easily accessible onboard is a must. The SP-5005 Waterproof Bluetooth Flashlight & Powerbank from Secur Products takes care of several of those items with one single device.

I like to keep a flashlight onboard, but this is no ordinary light. I love that you can also charge your cell phone with it when you're in the middle of the lake as well as listen to music with it. The 3-watt Bluetooth speaker can play your tunes for up to 28 hours on a single charge with a range of around 30 feet. Can your current flashlight do all that? Plus the SP-5005 is waterproof, so you never have to worry about it getting damaged around water.

Weighing in at 7.5 ounces and retailing for \$99.99, this is one multi-use product that a lot of pontoon or deck boat owners should have on their own boats.

—Roy Sparks, PDB Magazine



**PDB  
TESTED**

| TOOLS      | 91    |
|------------|-------|
| Portable   | 20/20 |
| Function   | 48/50 |
| Durability | 9/10  |
| Design     | 8/10  |
| Price      | 6/10  |

855-452-8388  
www.securproducts.com



**PRODUCT  
TEST**  
No. **198**

# LET'S GO AERO

## Silent Hitch Pin

I'm guessing most truck owners would prefer a locking hitch pin, unless you live in a town where no one bothers to lock their front door because all the neighbors trust each other. But what's better than a locking hitch pin? How about a locking Silent Hitch Pin that eliminates shock loads at the hitch connection for quiet, stable and motionless towing?

For lack of a better term, all receiver hitches have a little "slop" to them. The 5/8-inch diameter pin takes the movement out of the connection between the vehicle towing system and the device being towed.

The chrome-coated steel with heavy-duty spring nut insert and stainless



**PDB  
TESTED**

washer provides corrosion-free performance. It's simple to install and easily worth the \$32.95 investment.

—Roy Sparks, PDB Magazine

### AFTERMARKET **90**

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| Installation | 18/20 |
| Function     | 47/50 |
| Durability   | 9/10  |
| Design       | 8/10  |
| Price        | 8/10  |

877-464-2376  
www.letsgoaero.com



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## Insurance 101

**B**oating season is just around the corner and the boat show season is almost over. Hopefully the shopping, drooling and deal making have slowed down too and you have picked out the "new" boat for the new season.

One major expense that most people leave to the last is insurance. Talking about insurance can be boring, but it is a necessity. Sure you can call the agent that insures your car if you want limited coverage for your boat. But (shameless plug here) you should really start your insurance search with a marine insurance specialist, especially when you start operating bigger and more expensive boats. A dedicated marine policy will have special coverage for boats such as stated or agreed values, coastal territories and extras coverage that an auto or homeowner's policy just can't provide.

So before you make a decision about your fun on the water, let's review a few insurance topics that can affect your new purchase. The following topics are for boat insurance in general. So if it doesn't seem to fit your situation, it might not.

Marine underwriters look at a number of factors when they figure insurance premiums. These factors include the size of the boat, the location of the boat during storage and use, extra equipment, and the experience of the boat's owner/operator. If you are new to boating, you will probably want to stay below 26 feet for your first purchase. The 26-foot market is significant not only for coast guard safety requirements, but also from an underwriter position on experience and the covered territories. Most marine insurance companies will cover a 26-foot boat up to 50 miles from the coast and will provide insurance for new owners without any special requirements.

Look for a marine insurance policy that has an insured value of the vessel based on an "Agreed Value" compared to a policy that uses "Actual Cash Value." With Agreed Value coverage, the boat owner will be paid the insured value of the boat (minus a deductible) in the event of a total loss. The insurance company will not depreciate the value of the boat at the time of the loss.

Whereas in the event of a total loss with "Actual Cash Value" coverage, the boat owner will receive the insured value of the boat or the actual cash value (depreciated value), whichever is less. For example, if you have your boat insured for \$75,000 and have a total loss, the depreciated value of your boat may only be \$65,000 and the insurance company will pay the lesser amount.

Sometimes the term Stated Value is used. Don't confuse this with Agreed. Usually stated value means that the boat has a value stated on the policy and the insurance company agrees to pay that value as a maximum amount but can reduce that value with depreciation or market conditions, etc.

A few other items to look for are Separate Watercraft



Liability coverage. Don't rely on liability coverage that is an extension of the liability coverage on your homeowner's or auto policy. You want liability coverage for bodily injury and property damage that you (the insured) are found liable for when operating your boat.

Medical payment coverage for the insured and any friends or family who get injured while they are onboard the boat, boarding the boat, or departing from the boat.

A couple of optional coverages that are nice to include is Uninsured Boater coverage. It will pay for damages sustained from the actions of an uninsured boater. There are a few variations of what is covered; typically it covers bodily injury, but sometimes it can also cover property damage.

Towing Coverage applies to any service charge the insured may incur by receiving marine assistance. This may include coverage for a service charge for towing due to engine failure, mechanical breakdown, grounding and delivery of fuel.

Personal Property Coverage is for clothing, personal effects, fishing gear and sports equipment owned by you, your family or guests onboard your boat. Money, jewelry, traveler's checks and other valuable papers or documents are not included for this coverage.

This is just a brief highlight of marine-specific insurance; there is a lot more information that needs to be discussed in a marine policy. Each company has different definitions and limits on their coverage. Contact a qualified marine agent to explain the coverages in more detail. And remember, even if you take all the precautions, accidents still happen. Make sure you can get or have the right coverage for your boat before you buy. 🛥️

*Scott Sky Smith*

Sky Smith,  
PDB Staff Writer

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